

Message Text

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ORIGIN SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 R

DRAFTED BY EUR:JAARMITAGE:LM

APPROVED BY EUR - JOHN A. ARMITAGE

P - MR. HABIB (SUBS)

S/S - RGAMBLE

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 190965

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR YO

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S PRESS REMARKS

REF: BELGRADE 5067

1. YUGOSLAV AMBASSADOR HAS REQUESTED ON INSTRUCTIONS
APPOINTMENT WITH UNDER SECRETARY HABIB TO DISCUSS
URGENT BILATERAL MATTER. APPOINTMENT IS SET FOR 4:00 P.M.
AUGUST 3.

2. DOES EMBASSY TRANSCRIPT OF AMBASSADOR'S REMARKS TO
PRESS ON JULY 23 (BELGRADE 5067) CORRESPOND FULLY TO
NYTIMES VERSION BELOW? REQUEST CONFIRMATION OR CORRECTION
BY IMMEDIATE NIACT CABLE.

3. NYTIMES' REPORT OF TEXT OF AMBASSADOR'S COMMENTS:

"NYTIMES, SATURDAY, JULY 24, 1976.

"BELGRADE, YUGOSLAVIA, JULY 23--FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT OF
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REMARKS MADE TODAY BY LAURENCE H. SILBERMAN, UNITED STATES

AMBASSADOR TO YUGOSLAVIA, ON THE RELEASE OF LASZLO TOTH,
AN AMERICAN CITIZEN WHO HAD BEEN JAILED IN THAT COUNTRY.
THE REMARKS WERE TRANSCRIBED BY THE NEW YORK TIMES.

"HE IS NO MORE A SPY OF ANY KIND THAN MY AUNT MATILDA
OR MY 10-YEAR OLD DAUGHTER. AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED,
I HAVE ALWAYS FELT, AND MY CONVICTION IS DOUBLED AFTER
TALKING WITH HIM, THAT HE'S AS INNOCENT AS THE DRIVEN
SNOW.

NOW LET ME SAY A COUPLE MORE THINGS.

AS IS NO SECRET, I HAVE HAD MY DISPUTES WITH THE EASTERN
EUROPEAN SECTION OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT CONCERNING THIS
CASE. I HAVE ALWAYS FELT--AND INCIDENTALLY AFTER
TALKING WITH HIM FEEL IT EVEN MORE STRONGLY--THAT THE
UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT OWES COMPLETE SUPPORT TO ITS
CITIZENS IN SITUATIONS LIKE THIS.

I KNOW THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY FEEL THE SAME WAY.

WHEN WE GET TO THE POINT WHERE WE DON'T CARE ABOUT AN
AMERICAN CITIZEN INNOCENTLY IMPRISONED, THEN WE'RE NOT
MUCH OF A COUNTRY ANY MORE.

IT WAS ALWAYS DIFFICULT TO GET PEOPLE IN THIS COUNTRY
TO UNDERSTAND WHY WE CARED SO MUCH ABOUT LASZLO TOTH.
OFTEN I WAS ASKED, WELL, HOW CAN YOU CARE THAT MUCH
ABOUT THIS MAN?

AND I MUST SAY IT WAS DIFFICULT, SOMETIMES, TO CONVINCE
THE EASTERN EUROPEAN SECTION OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF
THE SAME THING. AND IT WAS, ON OCCASION MENTIONED THAT
HE WAS ONLY A RECENT CITIZEN. HE ONLY BECAME A CITIZEN
IN 1973.

WELL, TO PEOPLE WHO ASK THAT QUESTION, I REFER THEM TO
HENRY GRUNWALD'S PIECE IN TIME MAGAZINE ON THE BICEN-
TENNIAL, ON LOVING AMERICA. AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED
THE FACT THAT HE BECAME A CITIZEN IN 1973, IMMIGRATED
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TO THE UNITED STATES IN 1967, DOESN'T MAKE HIM ONE WIT
LESS PRECIOUS THAN ANY OTHER AMERICAN.

AND AFTER TALKING WITH HIM, I'M DAMN PROUD TO BE AN
AMERICAN.

NOW, I WAS CRITICIZED BY THE EASTERN EUROPEAN SECTION
FOR BEING TOO ZEALOUS IN THIS CASE. IT SAID I WAS

UNDIPLOMATIC FOR PRESSING THE CASE AS HARD AS I DID.

TO THESE PEOPLE DIPLOMACY APPARENTLY IS THE PASSIVE
PURSUIT OF AMERICAN INTEREST. AND I DON'T ACCEPT THAT.

I WAS CRITICIZED FOR PERMITTING THE PRESS TO HAVE
INFORMATION ON THIS CASE AS PER MY DISCUSSIONS AT
YOUR (CORRESPONDENTS') REQUEST LAST DECEMBER.

I WAS CRITICIZED FOR REFERRING TO IT IN A SPEECH AT
BLED, IN AN ADDRESS TO THE JOINT YUGOSLAV-AMERICAN
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE--BY OUR OWN PEOPLE IN THE EASTERN
EUROPEAN SECTION OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT. AND AS I'VE
INDICATED, THE EASTERN EUROPEAN SECTION ASKED THAT I
BE REPRIMANDED FOR UNDIPLOMATIC CONDUCT, BUT THE
SECRETARY TURNED DOWN THAT RECOMMENDATION AND SUPPORTED
ME.

AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED THE RELEASE OF TOTH BY THE
YUGOSLAV GOVERNMENT IS A RECOGNITION ON THEIR PART
THAT WE DO CARE DEEPLY ABOUT THE CAPRICIOUS IMPRISONMENT
OF AN AMERICAN.

AND I THINK THAT'S ALL TO THE GOOD, IN TERMS OF BUILDING
AND SOLIDIFYING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YUGOSLAVIA.

THEY MUST UNDERSTAND WHAT'S IN OUR VITAL INTEREST. AND
THE WELL-BEING OF AMERICAN CITIZENS IS OUR VITAL
INTEREST. I THINK THEY UNDERSTAND IT NOW.

SO I FEEL THAT WITH THE RELEASE OF TOTH, THE RELATION-
SHIPS WITH THIS COUNTRY ARE BETTER AND, INDEED, I WOULD
SAY THAT THE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THIS COUNTRY ARE BASED
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ON CERTAIN FUNDAMENTAL, LONG-TERM, COMMON INTERESTS."

HABIB

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Margaret P. Grafeld
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